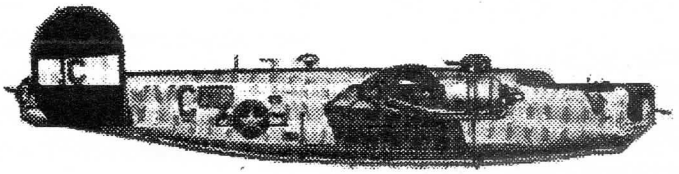
THE KASSEL MISSION CHRONICLES NEWSLETTER

WINTER 1997 / 1998



445th'S JIMMY STEWART

MISSIONS JIMMY STEWART FLEW WITH THE 445TH

by John Harold Robinson, 703rd Bomb Squadron, from "Tennessee Flyover"

THERE WERE MANY EVENTS and quotes during the period that I was associated with Jimmy Stewart, from 1 September 1943 to 31 March 1944, when Stewart was transferred to the 453rd BG as their Group Operations Officer. While Stewart was Squadron Commander of the 703rd, you didn't know until the last minute of briefing or when getting on the truck to go to the aircraft whether Jimmy Stewart was going to fly the mission. He would just come out dressed and get in one of the trucks.

We arrived in Tibenham, England, Station 124, APO 558, on 25 November 1943.



COMRADES-IN-ARMS
Jimmy Stewart and Clark Gable
(Eastern Counties Newspapers)

13 December 1943—Target: Keil, Germany. Jimmy Stewart flew his first mission as co-pilot on Lt. Cook's A/C 42-75559. My crew did not fly this mission.

(Continued on page 6)

KASSEL MISSION MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION, INCORPORATED

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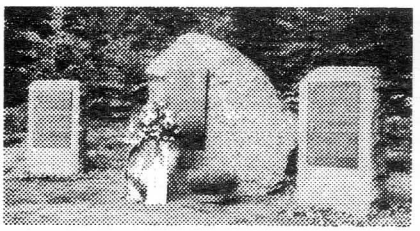
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ORGANIZATION CHARTER AND PURPOSES

THE KASSEL MISSION MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION was incorporated in the State of Michigan 16 May 1989 as a non-profit corporation, and was certified as a Federal Income Tax-exempt 501(c)(19) Veterans' Organization 29 Jan 1990.

Purposes of the Kassel Mission Memorial Association are:

1. To perpetuate and promote the memory and history of the Kassel Mission of 27 September 1944 by the 445th Bomb Group of the 8th Army Air Force, 2nd Bomb Division, 2nd Combat Wing.

2. To fund and dedicate one or more memorials to the Kassel Mission at appropriate locations.

3. To publish and promote books, articles, and video productions about the Kassel Mission and the 445th Bomb Group, Tibenham, England, in World War II.

THIS NEWSLETTER IS PUBLISHED twice annually for the information and benefit of members of the Kassel Mission Memorial Association. Membership in the organization is $7 per calendar year for both regular (veterans and their spouses) or associate members. Deadline for submission of material for the Spring/Summer Edition is April 1st. All material will be kept by the editor unless marked "Return to Sender When Finished."

KASSEL MISSION HISTORICAL SOCIETY OFFICERS ELECTED AT HARRISBURG

On Saturday, September 27, 1996, members of the Kassel Mission Memorial Association met at the Harrisburg-Marriott Hotel and unanimously elected the slate of officers proposed for the new Kassel Mission Historical Society.

It was proposed and accepted that the Kassel Mission veterans comprising the Memorial Association continue with their sons and daughters, in order to insure continuity of the goals and purposes of the new organization. Following are the officers and directors of the Kassel Mission Historical Society:

OFFICERS

William R. Dewey..... Chairman
Dr. Douglas E. Collar..... President
Reginald Miner ..... Executive Vice President
George M. Collar ..... Vice President-Historian
Ira Weinstein..... Vice President-Membership
Marilyn S. Dewey ..... Secretary-Treasurer

DIRECTORS

Frank Bertram
Jim Bertram
Hank Dobek
Jim Dowling
Reggie Kitchens
Ray Lemons
Jima Schaen Sparks

About fifty members attended the meeting, and heard the Treasurer of KMMA, Marilyn Dewey, report that KMMA is free and clear of all obligations, the books have been reviewed by the CPA firm of Gordon and Company, and that over $7,000 is in the KMMA American Century/Benham Capital Preservation Money Market Account. All funds will be rolled over into KMHS upon receipt of IRS approval of KMHS as tax-exempt, expected by midsummer, 1998.

After the election, new directors Jim Dowling and Ray Lemons were invited to give short statements about KMMA/KMHS, and 2nd ADA Journal editor Ray Pytel brought us up to date on the USAF Academy Liberator Sculpture Drive. The meeting was adjourned by Doug Collar, President of the new KMHS.

NEXT KMHS MEETING TO BE HELD AT SAVANNAH IN FALL OF 1999

Because of the tremendous demand for hotel rooms next fall, and the large number of groups planning to attend the Mighty 8th Heritage Museum at Savannah, it was decided to postpone the next KMMA/KMHS meeting until September, 1999. KMHS Director Reggie Kitchens has already started to work on that program, and we will keep you posted.

We encourage all Kassel Mission veterans and families to attend the 2nd Air Division National Reunion to be held over next Memorial Day weekend, May 22-25, 1998, at Oakbrook, Illinois. Kassel Mission veterans will be honored at that Reunion.

445TH AND KASSEL RAID HISTORY PROGRESSING

R.F. (Dick) Gelvin is doing an excellent job of compiling a complete roster of all troops that served in the 445th BG during WW II., and compiling crew lists from the data available. So far he has listed 93 pilots in the 700th BS, 83 in the 701st, 91 in the 702nd, and 92 in the 703rd. Ground crew seems to be the problem. Dick has lists of 1,981 names with no job classification shown. Dick plans to go to the

(Continued on page 19)



In Confederate Air Force's "Diamond Lil"
(Fred Nichols photo)

FROM THE COCKPIT

By William R. Dewey, Editor

IT WAS DECIDED at the Harrisburg East/Midwest Regional 2ADA Reunion last September 27th to integrate the veterans with the sons and daughters of Kassel Mission survivors, in order to assure continuity of the goals of KMMA, which in turn become the goals of the new KMHS organization.

KMHS was chartered as a non-profit corporation in the state of Michigan on October 17, 1997, but we must wait for IRS approval in order to get full federal tax deductibility. That IRS approval is expected in six months. Until that time, KMMA will continue to operate as a fund raising organization, but will be liquidated upon receiving IRS certification, and all funds will then be rolled over into KMHS.

More than ever, it is important that the Kassel Mission be recognized as a military disaster like the Charge of the Light Brigade, Custer's Last Stand, and Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg.

So the purposes of both KMMA and KMHS are still as listed on page 2 of this newsletter, and to perpetuate and promote the memory and history of the 445th Bomb Group in World War II.

Along those lines, my wife gave me a great book for Christmas—**"The Guiness Book of Flying Blunders"**, by Geoffrey Regan. No, the Kassel Mission is not mentioned—but it should be, and it will be one of my goals to contact the author and suggest its inclusion.

Author Geoffrey Regan pulls no punches, and calls the first Ploesti raid "a disaster". He is critical of Brigadier General Uzal G. Ent and Colonel Compton for pulling rank on a second lieutenant navigator, who pointed out that they were following the wrong railroad track, since it led away from Ploesti, rather than toward it!

"It is important that the Kassel Mission be recognized as a military disaster."

Certainly there were many navigators in the 35 B-24's of the 445th on 27 September 1944 that called attention to the gross navigational error that was made in turning toward Gottingen. Just ask Frank Bertram, Don Whitefield, or Corman Bean about it! The flak over Kassel where the main bomber stream was headed could be plainly seen out of the right windows of any Lib that day!

THE KMMA COMMISARY

NEW BOOK

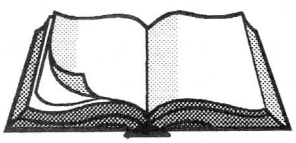
"OVER HERE"
The Americans in Norfolk during World War Two

HERE IS ANOTHER GREAT COFFEE-TABLE SIZED, hard bound book that should grace the library of every 8th Air Force veteran and their families. Steve Snelling of Norwich's daily newspaper, Eastern Daily Press, has put together this 204 page compilation of "the friendly invasion" of East Anglia. This book tells the story of the Americans who were "over-paid, over-sexed, and over here!"

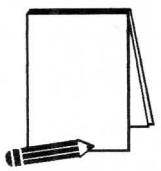
The over 250 pictures cover all phases of life and death of the Yanks that populated the English countryside around Norwich blending crash scenes with parades and visits from movie stars, this book shows it all. These illustrations vividly evoke the memories of the stresses of combat, the parties, the GI brides, the heroic endeavor that took place in 1943 to 1945.

Makes a great birthday or father's day present for you, if you ask your family to get it to for you! And if you are a World War II air history buff, this book belongs in your war library. KMMA has these books in limited stock for immediate shipment.

Your order for $35 plus $3 shipping and handling = $38.00 includes a tax-deductible contribution of $8 to the Kassel Mission Memorial Association. Send your check or money order to:



KMMA. INC.
P.O. BOX #413
BIRMINGHAM, MI 48012



445TH NOTE PADS STILL AVAILABLE

THESE 5 1/2 X 8 1/2" PADS, 50 sheets each, have the profiled B-24-J with 445th tail markings, and are available at $3 each, minimum order of four pads, or $12 plus $2 S&H = $14.00. Send your check to address above.

(Continued from page 1, Missions Stewart Flew)
Jimmy Stewart had to fly the first mission that the 703rd Squadron flew. That was Jimmy Stewart!

"He would just come out dressed and get in one of the trucks."

On the following missions, Lt. George Wright's crew (my crew), flew in a position either under or behind Jimmy Stewart's aircraft tail or on his left wing. George was usually lead of the second echelon, with his nose within ten feet of the first echelon lead aircraft's tail. Stewart would tell Wright to stay out of his tail. Wright had the ability to put an aircraft within inches of another and stay there in flight.

16 December 1943—Target: Bremen, Germany. I will only say here, "What a mission."

30 December 1943—Target: (Mannheim) Ludwigshaten, Germany. (One aircraft lost).



Captain Jimmy Stewart after mission
(445th BG photo)

5 January 1944—Target: Keil, Germany (One Aircraft Lost).

11 January 1944—Target: Meppin (Brunswick), Germany.

29 January 1944—Target: Frankfurt, Germany.

4 February 1944—Target: Russelshein, Germany. (My records show this as 3 February). Stewart flew with Johnson in A/C 42-7565.

5 February 1944—Target: Emden, Germany. Group was recalled, weather forced recall, no mission. Weather was so bad the 3rd, 4th and 5th of February that everything went wrong.

8 February 1944—Target: Watten, France. Stewart flew in Lloyd Sharrad's A/C 4239132.

20 February 1944—Target: Brunswick, Germany. Stewart flew as Flight Commander. (3 aircraft lost).

25 February 1944—Target: (Furth) Nurnburg. Stewart flew lead.

18 March 1944—Target: Friedrickshafen, Germany. (Two aircraft lost). Some records show this as the 17th, but our 703rd Squadron flew to this target on 16 March and again on18 March (per my records). Stewart was on the 18 March mission.

James M. Stewart was promoted to Major in January, 1944, and was transferred to the 453rd Bomb Group as Operations Officer 31 March 1944. At that time in the 703rd there were 71 officers and 433 enlisted men, fif-

teen aircraft under Jimmy Stewart's command.

BOMBER PILOT RECALLS DISASTROUS KASSEL RAID

From "The Arizona Republic", Monday, 21 July 1997

Col. Jimmy Stewart sickened by huge loss of lives

Sun City resident Web Uebelhoer flew in one of the most infamous air raids in U.S. Air Force history. He served along with Col. Jimmy Stewart.

By Web Uebelhoer

IT WAS SEPTEMBER OF 1944. The allies were winning the air war over Europe. The 445th Bomb Group, 35 aircraft strong, took off from our base at Tibenham, England, in the early morning hours, to join elements of the 8th Air Force. Our target was Kassel, Germany. We were after the Hermann tank factory in that city.

My crew was assigned to the deputy group lead on this mission. This means that in the formation, we were to fly on the right wing of the lead aircraft.

Over Europe we were greeted by a solid cloud mass at 6,000 feet. We couldn't see our target, but the 88mm (anti-aircraft guns) couldn't see us either. To confuse their radar, we dropped clouds of tinfoil strips. The strips worked. We were at a height of about four miles. I can remember looking down as the flak began to explode far below. Looks as though our prayers for a milk run might be answered.



Captain Web Ubelhoer
(445th BG photo)

Our lead aircraft had radar on board, as did we in the deputy lead aircraft. Things began to go wrong. Jim Fleur, radar officer on board our aircraft, notified me on the interphone that the lead aircraft wasn't flying the proper course to the target. We advised the command pilot of this and were told to fly a tight formation and to close it up.

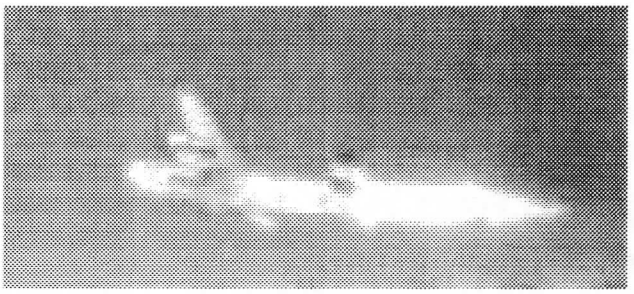
We found out later that we had missed our target completely.

"The ship on my right was on fire"

The other group of 35 aircraft each followed the proper course and bombed the target through the clouds. When we completed our run and dropped bombs, we looked for our proper place in the bomber stream, but we found we were alone, we had lost our bomber stream

and our "little friends", the fighter escort, had lost us.

At that point John Hubitze, tail gunner, called me on the interphone to inform me that there were all kinds of aircraft behind us. Remember, I said we were winning the air war. I thought Hubitze was seeing our fighters and they were playing around on the way home.



445th Liberator on fire 27 September 1944.
(445th BG photo)

Far from that! We were being attacked by an estimated 150 Messerchmitt 109s and Foce-Wulf 190s.

The first indication that I had that we were under attack were bursts of cannon fire exploding in front of us. An FW 190 came across our right wing going from rear to front. Mike Shew, in our nose turret, sprayed machine gun fire as though he had a garden hose. The right wheel on the 190 came down and he turned right down.

"...Col. Jimmy Stewart ... took it pretty hard"

The next item that demanded my attention was our lead ship. He was in serious trouble. An FW 190 was about 40 feet behind and below and firing for all he was worth. A B-24 is 110 feet, wingtip to wingtip. It is 66 feet from nose to tail and 17 feet high. I could see the command pilot, Maj. McCoy trying to signal me, but I couldn't understand. I could see movement of the crew through the waist window as the big bird slowly began to roll to the left as she started down.

I was now the leader. The ship on my right was on fire and the pilot was trying to maintain position on me. I don't know what happened to him.

We were saved by four P-38's going toward our rear. All of this happened in a short period of time. I tried to rally the ships that were still flying into some sort of formation, but they would have none of this. Five aircraft were all that remained of the more than 30 that had taken to the air for this mission.

One of the five would not make it home to Tibenham. Of the remaining four, one had no brakes and ran off the end of the runway. Three of us made it to our hardstands. One aircraft did not sustain battle damage.

My ship was hit by a 20mm cannon shell that passed through the oil supply for the No. 2 engine before it exploded. The self-sealing oil reservoir worked, and no oil was lost.

This, I am told, was the worst air defeat the U.S. Air Force experienced.

When I was dismissed from the debriefing room, a number of people gathered round to ask further questions. Among them was a re-



Stewart on the control tower at Old Buckenham.
(Eastern Counties Newspaper Archive)

spected member of the 445th Bomb Group-Col. Jimmy Stewart. He took it pretty hard. I thought he was going to become ill, but he made it through all right. Col. Stewart made no effort to take over the session. He paid close attention to the questions being asked and to the answers to those questions. He was deeply affected, as we all were, by the loss of approximately 250 young men in such a short period of time.

The next day the 445th Bomb Group was able to put up 10 aircraft. The group commander, Col. William Jones, asked me if I wanted to lead, as they were going to Kassel again. I should have gone, but I chickened out and said, "Thanks, but no thanks."

Six days later we were up to full strength again, and you guessed it-my crew and I led another raid on Kassel, Germany. There were no losses suffered in that raid.

JIMMY STEWART AND THE KASSEL MISSION

by William R. Dewey

WHILE JIMMY STEWART did not fly on the 27 September 1944 , he was closely involved. When the four Libs of the 445th landed at Tibenham, all that returned of the 35 that dropped bombs on Germany that day, Stewart flew over from wing headquarters to assist in the interrogation of the aircrews. Major Don McCoy, command pilot for the



Col. Jimmy Stewart receives French Croix de Guerre.
(G. Ward, 100th BG Museum)

445th who was killed on the mission, was a close friend and peer of Stewart's, when they were both squadron commanders at Tibenham.

Web Uebelhoer 's 21 July 1997 Arizona Republic newspaper article is reprinted above, describing Stewart's reaction to the Kassel Mission.

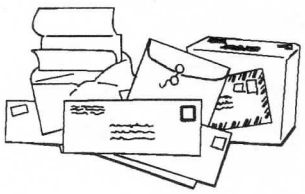
Evidently no one could believe that any

group of the 8th AF could sustain such a severe loss in the fall of 1944. Didn't we have complete air supremacy over Germany?

The Luftwaffe had hardly been seen by the 2nd Combat Wing since the 24 February 1944 Gotha Mission, when the 445th fought German fighters all the way in and out of the target area, losing 13 bombers.

Yes, Jimmy Stewart was involved in the aftermath of the Kassel Mission, and the disaster obviously had a profound effect upon him.

MAIL CALL



Dear Bill,

YOU MAY NOT REMEMBER ME, but I flew on many missions with you in a plane named "Patches". Lt. Raphael Carew and I alternated in this plane until he drew the "short straw" on 27 September 1944. I flew the plane the next day (one of ten) back to Kassel and I can tell you we were shaking in our boots, but it was a milk run. I only learned recently that Carew was a POW and his co-pilot was murdered, as detailed in the Journal.

I remember vividly the empty mess hall and bar that night, but what sticks out in my mind was the next morning when I went down to the flight line and there were 300 abandoned bicycles. I could have had my choice, but didn't have the heart for it.

New airplanes and crews came the next day, and I had to test fly many of them.

Your newsletter mentioned Lt. Solien. He contacted me several years ago when he saw my article in the Journal about my reactions to this tragedy. Up to this time, I thought he was dead.

The picture of the B-24 taking off runway 21 brought back memories. Harold Parsons, my navigator, told me we took off the chimney of the house at the end of the runway on a mission with four 2000# bombs and an air plane that was misaligned. I thought we had "bought the farm" and it took me 5 miles at tree top level to gain flying speed, because it kept stalling out.

Don Baumler

Clarence, NY

•

Dear Bill,

YOUR NEWSLETTER IS A VERY GOOD ONE. Trombly (in letter to editor) was wrong. Only 10 A/C went off on the 28th. I was one of them.

"My navigator told me we took the chimney off the house"

Charles L. (Chuck) Walker

Dallas, Texas

(Editor's note: Chuck also advised us to contact Turner Publishing Company regarding inclusion of the Kassel Mission story and the building of the Memorial in their newest edition of The Second Air Division book. George Collar has submitted a complete story which will be included in the new publication, due out this summer.)

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Christmas cards were received from Walter and Liesel Hassenpflug, from Gunter and Trudie Lemke, and Walter Hein.

•

Our Belgian friend, Luc Dewez also sent a Christmas card and added a note that he and Sophie will be attending the 2nd Air Division Reunion in Oakbrook, Illinois next May. Luc asked that any of your Kassel Mission veterans who have not responded, to please answer his letter.



(Luke Dewez Photo)

Luc has sent me a picture of the cross at Ardennes National Cemetery in Belgium where my first copilot, William L. Boykin, Jr., is buried. Boykin made 1st pilot after Kassel. Lt. Boykin was killed by German fighters at Misberg on 26 November 1944.

THE BEST YEARS OF OUR LIVES REVISITED

by Doug Collar, KMHS President-Elect



Doug Collar

LATELY I'VE BEEN READING McKinley Kantor's verse novel GLORY FOR ME, the source for the Oscar winning 1946 film, THE BEST YEARS OF OUR LIVES, which dramatized the return to civilian life of veterans Fred Derry, Al Stephenson, and Homer Wermeis. This long out of print novel not only enriches an appreciation of the film characters, but also eloquently captures the postwar flavor of life in mythical Boone City, USA. Most importantly, for me, a 1946 vintage baby boomer and son of a Kassel Mission survivor, Kantor's novel reconnects me to those epic years of transition from war to peace.

Kantor had flown missions with the RAF and 8th Air Force, thus his account of bombardier Fred Derry's experiences resonate with realism and authenticity.

Kantor writes:

"He walked the road in chilly darkness. Over Vegesack he saw Gadorsky's fort go down.

When you came out of War to quiet streets
You lug your War along with you.
You walk a snail path.
On your back you carry it."

> *"Memories persist, even now, of battle and of those who did not return"*

Most of you know the plotline from the film, of how Fred, Al and Homer slowly readjust to civilian life through their mutual friendship and with the support of the women who love them. Kantor's novel, however, reminds the reader that the veterans remember things not easily forgotten or share with their families. As Fred thinks:

"So many people that I came to know:
Clark, Stein and March
And Callahan,
Gadorsky, Perkins,
Stone and Scott,
Bailey, McClintic,
Pee Wee Reese...
Recite the litany
Of all the Down"

Over fifty years after the fact, Kantor's moving verse reminds us that there was not only courage in the skies and fields of battle but also in carrying out productive lives after the war for those who came home. There were educations to complete, careers to start, wives to woo, children to raise, mortgages to pay. Yet, memories persist, even now, of battle and of those who did not return. Recalling a buddy shot down over Nantes on the Fourth of July, Fred Derry remembers:

"This is the way that I think of you always:
Cocky and walking untrammeled and quick.
This is the way I shall see you forever:
Tough face and monkey-mouth wrinkled.
Leather arms swaying,
you walk at the Base,
Dingy gold bars on the loops of your jacket,
Childish forever you swagger and sing..
Secret and shapeless,
named Missing in Action..
So I will think, sitting silent in Briefing,
So I will wonder in looking at maps:
How did it happen, the thing that has happened?
Now I shall utter in whispers, the failures;
How did that Messerschmitt do it to you?"

So it is that the veterans of the Kassel Mission and their children today strive to understand the meaning of the events of September 27, 1944. Maybe, like McKinley Kantor's fictional bombardier, Fred Derry, it comes down to remembering and never forgetting those young men who had no homecoming. And also in telling their story truthfully to all who ask.

May 1998 bring health, happiness, and peace to all in the KMHS extended family!

BUILDING A MEMORIAL OF HOPE

By Thomas Beldon,
"Army Times",
17 November 1997

THE WORD "UNIQUE" comes from the Latin *"unicus,"* meaning single, or one of a kind.

Say "*einmalig*" in German. A word to be handled with care, it is used like its English counterpart to describe the *only* one.



Walter Hassenpflug
(W. Hassenpflug Collection)

The Hessen Forest in the Kassel region of central Germany has a memorial marker that is unique. Purported to be the only one of its kind in the world, the memorial was built by former adversaries and is dedicated to both the German and American dead of a World War II air battle.

Behind the story of that somber stone tribute to fallen airmen is the tale of a remarkable man named Walter Hassenpflug and a letter that beat the odds.

Upon first meeting Hassenpflug, you may be reminded of a middle-aged school teacher—maybe a coach. Trim, with graying, close-cropped hair, he is a quiet, methodical man who pays attention to detail.

Hassenpflug is a historian and a humanitarian who believes we all can learn from the past. He earned the Federal Meritorious Service Medal, Germany's highest award for civic action, for his decades of research that are credited with making the Kassel Mission Memorial marker a reality.

Indeed, it is an honor well-deserved. Hassenpflug has dedicated a large part of his life to investigating a minutes-long battle. Some say it lasted five minutes, others claim it was closer to three. But everyone agrees it was over quickly.

If not for Hassenpflug's efforts, this bloody air battle, remarkable for its confusion and destruction, may have been buried, a historical footnote, after the survivors passed from the scene. Instead, the painstaking research of one man resulted in a memorial dedicated to reconciliation, a memorial of hope that men can learn from the mistakes of the past.

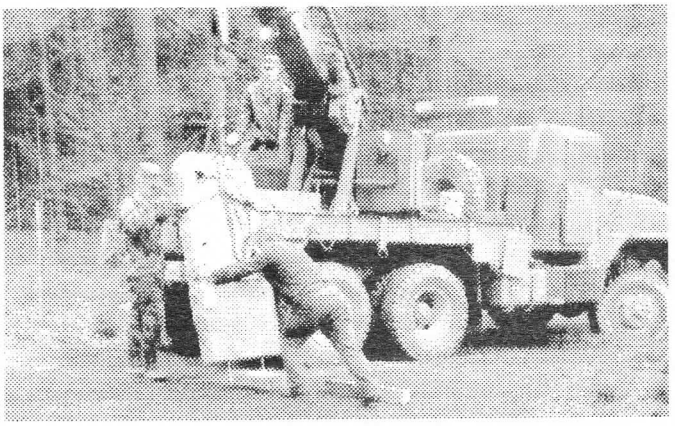
Kassel Mission Memorial is nestled in rolling farmland about 40 miles south of Kassel, Germany, and just outside the village of Friedlos. A small road sign marks the German fairy tale lane meandering a few kilometers out of town to the Kassel memorial, but everyone in Friedlos seems to know where the memorial is.

Hassenpflug was 12 when the short air battle took place over his village. The young boy helped capture a wounded American officer after the battle when he, along with fellow schoolmates, was combing farm fields outside Friedlos for leaflets and phony ration cards dropped during a subsequent American air raid in the area.

Weeks after the airman's capture, Hassenpflug's parents were killed in another

bombing raid. The events of that 1944 autumn were indelibly stamped in the child's memory.

Years later, as an adult, Hassenpflug was frustrated in his attempts to research the battle. The deaths of many of those involved, along with red tape and the destruction or loss of records, made information hard to find. Some of the planes had gone down in the former East Germany, and he got little help from behind the Iron Curtain. Hassenpflug began a letter writing campaign to, among others, veterans' organizations in the United States.



U. S. Army uses heavy equipment to set memorial stones.
(Walter Hassenpflug Collection)

He finally hit pay dirt when a chance letter led him to the former U.S. airman he had helped capture years earlier.

An American veterans' organization dedicated to preserving the memory of the battle learned of Hassenpflug's search. The president of the Kassel Mission Memorial Association, an American named William R. Dewey, suggested that a battle monument be built on some appropriate site in Germany The spot chosen was the final resting place of the ill-fated lead bomber, a Liberator piloted by the group leader, American Capt. John W. Chilton

The German state of Hessen donated the property for the memorial, while the U.S. Army provided heavy equipment. Costs of site preparation were donated by Germans, with assistance from a U.S. garrison at nearby Bad Hersfeld. A local German construction company donated the stone.

The memorial stands as a grim reminder of the nightmare of a short, vicious battle between German fighters and American bombers and fighters during the last months of the war. In frenzied minutes about 60 aircraft from both sides were knocked out of the air in the vicinity of Bad Hersfeld. More than 130 young German and American men were killed in a dramatic air battle triggered when American bombers heading for a locomotive factory target strayed from their course and lost friendly fighter support. The American air crews were attacked by more than 100 German fighters in a free-for-all battle in the skies southeast of Kassel.

A wooded hill overlooking Friedlos is crowned by the Nordic stone memorial marking the place where one of the first aircraft of the battle was shot down. It is a testimony to the German and American casualties in that minutes-long running fight for the skies.

The memorial was dedicated in 1990, the result of efforts by many Germans and Americans. It stands today as a solemn reminder of a grim chapter in their joint history, a hope

that people can learn from the past.

The bronze plaque describing the battle is mounted on a six-ton central stone. Names of airmen killed in the battle are inscribed on stone-mounted plaques on both sides. The memorial was dedicated in a joint German-American ceremony when members of America's 445th Bomb Group met their former Luftwaffe fighter-pilot enemies in a gesture of friendship and reconciliation.

Thomas Beldon is a free lance writer, an ex-U. S. Marine, who lives in White Pigeon, Michigan.

A TAIL GUNNER'S ACCOUNT

by Frank Plesa

IT SEEMED TO ME that most of the damage was from under at first. I recall seeing the small size bursts of orange with white or grey puffs of smoke like flak all around us for at least thirty seconds before I saw fighters firing at us from the rear or six o'clock level.

Our plane's antenna cable was dangling behind my tail turret and the intercom was out. I could hear, but no one could hear me call out when I did see the fighters. I heard the navigator ask the nose gunner, "What's wrong, Lello?", then Johnnie, the right waist gunner asked me, "Frank, what's wrong?". I heard T.J. Myers, engineer/top turret, call out, "What is that? Flak?", then he calls 'Fighters, six o'clock!"

I fired several bursts at a FW19O, five hundred yards away, coming in at 6 o'clock level. It and the other fighters turned belly up and went down. I would guess for another attack. I could hear and feel a waist gunner firing and the Martin upper (Myers) as I was firing, but I never heard the nose or the right waist guns fire. We had no belly or



Mowat crew on way to England. Plesa (third from left) and Myers (kneeling) survived.
(M. B. Barnard Collection)

Sperry ball-turret gun in our plane.

When the first attack of FW19Os turned over and down to their right, I didn't see any more fighters for about ten seconds. Then I noticed a FW190 to my right; it seemed as if it was fifty feet over to his wing tip. I was amazed he was so close. He was throttled down and firing his guns (cannons) at the bomber in front of him and at us, I assume. I didn't know how to fire at the fighter at such close range. I could see his blue eyes, the big black cross on top of his right wing and his guns blazing yellow fire.

I put my optical sight on his engine cowl and fired and raked his front fuselage and possibly his cockpit with bursts for three to four seconds. I felt a shell hit under my turret, near my right foot; then another shell a split-second later on the left side of my turret. This shell bent the left gun up and blew

out the top and front bullet proof windows and me, all going out at the same time. I felt as if a horse had kicked me in the chest. My turret was facing around eight o'clock. I was blown out except my right leg and foot which was tangled up in hydraulic lines. Most of my body was on the right side of the catwalk and against the fuselage. I could smell 100 octane gas through the oxygen mask. I had seen the B-24 on our left side burn for awhile before it exploded. I wanted to get ready to bail out, but my right foot was trapped. I was also wounded in my left forearm and the right side of my chest.



"Hot Rock" in formation
(M. B. Barnard Collection)

I looked back for Johnnie Neher, the right waist gunner. He wasn't at his position. I thought I could see him down in a black sort of object (his heated flying suit?). Willie, the left waist gunner, was at his position and firing with his right hand. He was wounded badly on the upper left side. His heated flying suit was blood soaked along his left arm, which was hanging limply. I tried to get his attention, but he was firing the gun and didn't notice me. I heard no other guns. What I feared most came next—the plane was on fire and was burning throughout. The flames came like a blowtorch. Willie's gun was quiet. It got hot as the flames come through the tail which was open. I covered my face, feeling the intense heat. I thought of my parents, loved ones and God. I can recall myself screaming in my mask. I can still hear it. I felt a hand on my right shoulder and saw a vision of a white robe. I felt and heard a big puff, then everything went black.



"Hot Rock" on
Tibenham Hardstand
(M. B. Barnard Collection)

I could feel the cold air and tumbling about. It felt sort of good compared to the previous heat, only I felt helpless. I came to my senses and looked around. Our wing was right next to me, within fifty feet, flip-flopping over with fire coming from its tanks. I looked down and recall I was just issued a back type parachute two weeks ago. My burned right hand pulled the rip cord. I looked up and saw that the chute opened.

Next I started looking down at the ground. It was very quiet now and in about ten seconds the ground started to come up fast. I noticed high power lines, a forest and a farm house near a pasture. I landed hard.

A Hitler youth greeted me and asked if I were American or English. We removed my parachute and I hobbled over to the farm house with him. I was quite helpless and burned. A woman came out and they put me in a barn with hay and a ladder. She looked at my chest wound and said, "Gott", gave me an

(Continued on page 19)

50th Anniversary Convention - Reservation Form

Name _____ Group _____

Spouse _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Group for Group Dinner Seating _____ Group for Banquet Seating _____

Arrive _____ Depart _____ First 2ADA Convention? _____

Single ____ Double ____ Triple ____ Quad ____ Will Share ____ (Non-Smoking?) _____

Special Room Request: Non-Smoking ____ Handicapped ____ King ____ Two Doubles ____

Deposit _____ Paid in Full _____

Nicknames _____

Names of Additional Persons in Triple or Quad Rooms _____

_____

DO NOT CALL HOTEL FOR RESERVATIONS, CHANGES, CANCELLATIONS, ETC. ALL OF THESE SHOULD BE SENT TO:
Evelyn Cohen, 6410 Delaire Landing Road, Philadelphia, PA 19114-4157 • Tel. 215-632-3992

Tour Options - Sunday, May 24, 1998

1. CUNEO MANSION & HISTORIC CITY OF LONG GROVE.
   One of the most elegant mansion estates in the Chicago area. Venetian style architecture, elaborate furnishings and opulent gardens. On to Long Grove, a picturesque village settled in the early 1800s, with elegant little shops, charming boutiques and an incredible antique emporia. Lunch will be served at Season's wonderful restaurant. *Cost: $51.00 per person.*

2. CHICAGO HIGHLIGHTS
   Chicago's finest overall sightseeing tour includes the Navy Pier, a spectacular playground on the lake with dozens of restaurants, shops and exhibits. The tour will include Lake Shore Drive, Magnificent Mile, etc. You will have lunch on your own at the Navy Pier. After lunch you will board a cruiser that will take you up the Chicago river and through the locks to show you Chicago's magnificent skyline.
   Cost: $31.00 per person.

TOUR RESERVATION FORM — 2nd Air Division Association — Sunday, May 24, 1998

Name _____ Phone # _____

Trip 1 – Cuneo Mansion No. Persons _____ Check Enclosed: Total _____

Trip 2 – Chicago Highlights No. Persons _____ Check Enclosed: Total _____

Mail this form with your check or money order payable to:
On The Scene, 54 W. Illinois, Suite 1150, Chicago, IL 60610, phone 312-661-1440.
Cancellations no later than May 12 — cancellation fee $5.00.

DO NOT MAIL THIS TOUR RESERVATION FORM TO EVELYN COHEN

Second Air Division Association
50th Anniversary Convention - May 23-26, 1998

OAK BROOK HILLS HOTEL & RESORT, 3500 MIDWEST ROAD, OAK BROOK HILLS, IL 60522
TEL. (630) 850-5555

Schedule of Events

Friday, May 22
Registration • Early Bird Party with Cash Bar & Complimentary Buffet

Saturday, May 23
Registration • Golf Tournament
Cocktail Party and Buffet Dinner
Awards Ceremony

Sunday, May 24
Buffet Breakfast • Tours
Cocktail Party • Group Dinners

Monday, May 25
Buffet Breakfast • Business Meeting
Men's Luncheon • Ladies' Luncheon
Cocktail Party • Banquet & Dance

Tuesday, May 26
Buffet Breakfast
Departure

Costs per person

The costs listed below are for the entire package (5/23 – 5/26) listed above, including hotel room for three nights. For special arrangements, call Evelyn Cohen, (215) 632-3992.

Single Occupancy	$525.00
Double Occupancy	$405.00 per person
Triple Occupancy	$360.00 per person
Quad Occupancy	$340.00 per person

Deposit with Reservations – $50.00 per person – payment in full by April 1, 1998.

Cancellation Policy: 60 days prior to convention – $15.00 charge per person
30 days prior to convention – $25.00 charge per person
Full Refund at the discretion of the Convention Committee (if funds are available).

Important Notes

Extra Hotel Nights: $82.00 + 8.5% tax. All extra nights and incidentas are to be paid directly to the hotel upon checkout.

Non-Smoking Rooms: 150

Handicapped Rooms: 10

Parking: Self Parking at no charge; Valet Parking available.

Reservations: Cut off date is April 20 — after this date if space available.

Tours: See page 40 for information and reservation form.

Limo Service: **American Limo:** For reservations call (630) 920-8888 – for pickup call (800) 762-6888. **O'Hare** – $16.00 per person – after 11 PM $30.00 each.
Midway – $22.00 per person – after 11 PM $33.00 each.
Pick up your luggage and then call 800 number for pickup area.

Golf Tournament: At hotel golf course. Call or write: Kurt or Vicky Warning, 2736A N. Dayton, Chicago, IL 60614, phone (773) 549-3546.

(Continued from page 3, Kassel Raid History)

College Park, MD Archives after year-end to copy all the rest of the available 445th records. A complete, new history of the 445th will use all of this data. Any Pilots' Briefing Notes (Formation Diagrams) that you pilots have will be helpful to Dick. His address: R.F. Gelvin, 2302 East Elmwood Street, Mesa, AZ 85213-5910, Phone: 602/844-2797—e-mail: RFrankG@worldnet.att.net



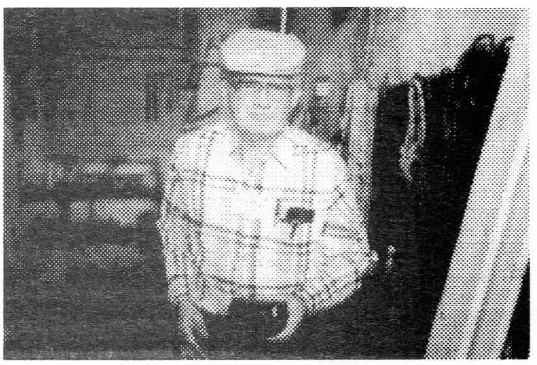
445th BG memorial at Tibenham
(Doug Collar photo)

(Continued from page 16, Tail Gunner's Account)

apple and told me she would get help. The German GI's picked me up in a horse and buggy and took me to Hersfeld train station. I waited there for hours, lying on a stretcher. That evening, I was in a hospital (in Frankfurt, I believe) with nuns in white giving first aid and comfort to the many wounded placed in the hallways and corridors.

In the hospital, I received a shot, had my burns treated and the biggest parts of shrapnel were removed. I felt better the next morning. I was then transported to an Allied POW hospital near Menningen, where British doctors closed my chest wound, leaving in a tube for penicillin which the Amencan Red Cross furnished. I healed slowly and several places of burns required skin grafts. I stayed at this hospital until the middle of December, when I was removed to a convalesent home.
The first part of February, I was in Luft IV. For me, the most difficult part of POW life was the forced march to keep away from the Russians. We were liberated May 2, by the British Second Army, the happiest day ever for me and the others.

I saw T.J. Myers in the POW hospital. He wasn't hit too badly and went to Luft IV in about a month. I never saw or heard of anyone else in our crew and their fate until I got home. I was afraid that the other seven went down with or around "Hot Rock". I was a very fortunate and lucky nineteen year old airman and will never forget the crew.



Frank Plesa, 1990, in German barn where he was kept 27 September 1944.
(Reg Miner photo)

Sgt. Frank Plesa, 703rd Sq., Lt. William Mowat's crew, was the tail gunner on "Hot Rock". They flew in the low left squadron.

Excerpt from a letter to Mary Beth Barnard

The Kassel Mission Chronicles Newsletter

P.O. Box 413
Birmingham, MI 48012

FIRST CLASS MAIL

DELIVER TO:

BULLETIN

KASSEL MISSION SURVIVORS TO BE HONORED

IT IS NOW OFFICIAL! Kassel Mission Survivors will be introduced and honored with a certificate at the 2nd Air Division Association 50th Anniversary Reunion at Oakbrook, Illinois at the Awards Ceremony, Saturday, May 23, 1998.

Evelyn Cohen, 2nd Air Division Vice President, has advised your editor that you and your families will be treated with great respect at the Reunion.

We have included information and a reservation form in this issue of the Kassel Mission Chronicles, in case you have not received the Winter Edition of The Second Air Division Journal.

If you are not now an active member (veteran or spouse), or an associate member of the Second Air Divison Association, send in your $15 dues for 1998 along with your reservation, to Evelyn Cohen. The 44- page Journal is issued four times a year, and is alone well worth your dues investment!

AT THE TOP OF YOUR RESERVATION, MARK THAT YOU ARE A KASSEL MISSION SURVIVOR, OR MEMBER OF KMMA/KMHS, AND EVELYN SAYS YOU WILL BE PLACED IN A SPECIAL SECTION OF THE HOTEL ESPECIALLY RESERVED FOR KMMA/KMHS MEMBERS AND FAMILIES.